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# Can the capitalist economic system deliver environmental justice?

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## Environmental Research Letters



## LETTER

## Can the capitalist economic system deliver environmental justice?

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E-mail: [karen.bell@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:karen.bell@bristol.ac.uk)**Keywords:** environmental justice, political economy, environmental values, capitalism, climate change, global politics**Abstract**

Can a healthy environment for all social groups be delivered through capitalism via market mechanisms? Or is it the capitalist system, itself, that has been at the root of the environmental and social crises we now face? This letter engages with this ongoing debate by drawing on material from a wider study, 'Achieving Environmental Justice', which examined the extent, form and causes of environmental justice and injustice in a range of countries with varying depths of marketization—United States, South Korea, United Kingdom, Sweden, China, Bolivia and Cuba. The analysis described here focuses on the interview material from this mixed methods study, drawing on over 140 interviews with officials, policy makers, and civil society leaders. The letter argues that there is an apparent propensity for capitalist processes to exacerbate, rather than reduce, environmental problems and inequities though the pursuit of relentless economic growth and profit accumulation. Therefore, we should perhaps let go of efforts to resolve environmental injustice within the constraints of capitalism and, instead, build an alternative economic system that can meet human needs in the context of a harmonious and respectful relationship with nature.

**Introduction**

Environmental justice, while a contested concept, can be said to embrace ecology, equality and democracy. It can be more specifically defined in terms of a healthy environment (substantive environmental justice), an equitable distribution of environmental 'goods' (distributive environmental justice); and fair, participatory and inclusive structures and processes of environmental decision making (procedural environmental justice) (see Bell 2014). This wide definition covers most of the aspects of environmental justice covered in the academic literature on the topic (e.g. see Sze and London 2008) and also fits with activist and social movement definitions, for example as found in the principles adopted by delegates of the First National People of Color Environmental Justice Summit (1991). It implies that environmental justice solutions cannot be considered to be socially 'just' if they merely displace environmental or social problems elsewhere, whether structurally, spatially or temporally. Therefore, environmental and social problems and solutions must be conceived of holistically, as contextualised and interconnected. This seems a

reasonable approach in view of the recent evidence reporting multiple environmental and social crises, of which climate change is but one. For example, from 2009, the Stockholm Resilience Centre have showed that, as a result of human activities, we have now either crossed, or are imminently in danger of crossing, nine earth system 'planetary boundaries' within which humanity can safely live (Rockström *et al* 2009, Steffen *et al* 2015). Hence, to deliver environmental justice, we must address a whole range of interconnected and urgent issues. It, therefore, makes sense to look at macro policies and overall structures to assess whether they support the resolution and integration of these issues and the achievement of environmental justice in the round.

Some believe that capitalism is compatible with, or even ideally suited to, this task (for example, Gore 2000, Porritt 2007) whilst others have suggested that the market economy, as the source of these crises, could never be part of its solution (for example, Foster *et al* 2010, Kovel 2002, Pepper 2010, Magdoff and Foster 2011, Parr 2012). This paper responds to recent calls for greater research and discussion in relation to this debate (e.g. Fuentes-George 2013, Pearse 2014).

It begins with a short review of the discussion to date, outlining the various theoretical positions. Following this, the question of whether capitalism can deliver environmental justice is examined with reference to the interviews undertaken as part of a wider study undertaken by the author on 'Achieving Environmental Justice' (Bell 2014) which looked at environmental justice and injustice in a range of countries with varying degrees of marketization. Finally, conclusions are drawn as to the likelihood of capitalism delivering environmental justice and some proposals and offered in the form of general principles about how an environmentally just world might best be achieved.

## Capitalism and the environment

This section very briefly outlines the relevant debates around markets, capitalism, the environment and environmental justice from a pro-capitalist, as well as a more critical perspective. Those who favour market solutions, so-called 'market environmentalists' assert that improved efficiency, technological innovation, free trade and pricing mechanisms can be effective means of addressing environmental problems, perhaps even bypassing the need for regulation. The changes that are needed, it is argued, are more likely to occur within capitalism since its competitive aspect drives companies to become more efficient and innovative so as to out-perform rivals and create new profit-making market opportunities. From this perspective environmental problems can be seen as primarily an outcome of the fact that the expense of destroying the Earth is largely absent from the prices set in the marketplace (e.g. Hawken *et al* 1999, Juniper 2014). Hence, it is proposed that nature be quantified in monetary terms ('given value') to enable its reduction into tradable commodities, implying the privatisation, commodification and monetisation of nature as embodied in, for example, 'payments for ecosystems services'. Any social inequality that persists or increases alongside these environmental policies is seen as either a separate, or an unimportant, issue; or else a problem that is remediable through yet more marketization and increased economic growth with perhaps some adjunct regulatory measures. Such approaches are reflected in, and promoted by the type of 'Green Economy' and 'Green Growth' agendas now being promoted by international organisations such as UNEP (2011) and the OECD (2013). Hence, the market approach assumes that environmental issues can be fixed with new technology, smarter economic incentives and impartial management within current societal structures. From this perspective, alternative means of addressing environmental and social issues, such as redistribution of wealth, reducing consumption, or banning harmful activities, are seen as naïve or detrimental to the goal of winning over support for environmentalism.

Furthermore, it is argued, capitalism cannot be held responsible for environmental harms and injustices because socialism has a worse environmental record (e.g. as described in Singleton 1985). Hence, some assert, it is the type of capitalism that is problematic for environmental justice, rather than capitalism *per se*. This view rests on the idea that there is no monolithic capitalist system, as 'varieties of capitalism' (VoC) analysts assert. The VoC approach follows the publication of a seminal work by Hall and Soskice (2001) who distinguished between liberal market economies (LMEs) and coordinated market economies (CMEs). There has been little application of this approach to environmental issues, though one VoC study looked at the question of whether differing environmental impacts would result from the various VoC (Mikler and Harrison 2012). This study found that the United States LME model was less effective in addressing climate change than the CME VoC, such as Germany and Japan. However, the VoC approach has been critiqued by those who point out the actual lack of variety to be found in different manifestations of capitalism (e.g. Howell 2003) and the need to reassert a Marxist understanding of capitalism which has commonality in its emphasis on competition (e.g. Coates 2014). From this position, it is the logic of capitalism that is undermining environmental quality, rather than any specific manifestation of it.

Those who take this view, including a wide range of academics, commentators and social movement activists, consider market environmentalism a harmful project and emphasise the contradictions between capitalism and environmental and social justice (e.g. Faber and O'Connor 1993, Schnaiberg and Gould 2000, Berry 2003, Williams 2005, Pellow 2007, Magdoff and Foster 2011, Parr 2012, Klein 2014). They see capitalism as inhibiting, rather than encouraging, innovation since private industry will only develop those technologies that it believes will be profitable. Furthermore, they point to the inherent need, within capitalism, for companies to endlessly produce more and more so as to maintain profits and be competitive against rivals. In a capitalist system, they argue, production and consumption are driven so that the system can survive, rather than to meet social needs and enhance environmental wellbeing. Because the system requires constant growth, excessive natural resources are depleted and unsustainable levels of waste are created. Moreover, the drive for profit encourages cost cutting, putting pressure on corporations to choose the cheapest processes. Companies have to make short-term decisions based on what will help their business to survive, even if this harms society and the environment. This potentially means exploitation of people and the rest of nature in the form of low wages, casual work, unsustainable extraction, irresponsible handling of waste and periodic as well as localised crises that tend to be borne by the worst-off. At the same time, much of the wealth

created is siphoned off to elites, enabling vast concentrations of affluence (as recently documented by Picketty 2014). Hence, in 2012, an Oxfam report showed that the 100 richest people in the world earned enough that year to end extreme poverty, worldwide, four times over (Oxfam 2012). Such levels of inequality are problematic for environmental justice because wealth and income usually determine access to environmental resources and the ability to avoid environmental harms. Inequality also undermines procedural environmental justice because wealth enables control over environmental decision-making. The richest have the most resources with which to defend their interests and so they are able to subvert local and national environmental democracy through funding anti-environmental movements and election candidates and forming powerful lobbies to shape government policies to protect their economic interests (see Faber and O'Connor 1993, Faber 2008, Magdoff and Foster 2011). As Magdoff and Foster (2011) point out, as a consequence of the power of these wealthy elites, a culture develops among political leaders in capitalist countries based on the assumption that, what benefits capitalist business, benefits the country as a whole. Therefore, the state in capitalist societies has played a very limited role in environmental protection. From this perspective, the environmental destruction that occurred under socialism was the result of the productivist mindset that characterised early 20th Century modernity, in general (Foster 2008) whereas environmental destruction and injustice within capitalism are part of its inherent logic.

These very divergent views about the role of capitalism in relation to the environment and environmental justice will now be discussed in relation to the interviews carried out for the study on 'Achieving Environmental Justice'.

## Methods

This research project explored the intra-national (within country) environmental justice situation in seven countries—United States, South Korea, United Kingdom, Sweden, China, Bolivia and Cuba. These countries were selected, not only to cover a wide variety of state/market forms, but also because they exemplify a range of approaches to environmental justice, all of which have received positive international recognition. For example, Cuba had been found to be the only country in the world to be sustainably meeting human development standards (WWF 2006) while South Korea had been praised for its leading role in developing a Green Economy (UNEP 2010).

The study spanned six years and included mining secondary datasets, undertaking document reviews, carrying out semi-structured interviews and engaging in participant observations. Due to limited space, it is not possible to describe each method and its findings

in sufficient detail here and so this paper draws only on the interview material, though it is important to point out that this material generally reinforced the data derived from the other methods (see Bell 2014 for a more in-depth account of the entire study). The interviews (n140) were with state representatives, civil society organisers, local 'experts', academics, workers and residents. A minimum of sixteen interviews were carried out in each country and each interviewee generally represented a much larger group i.e. they were the leaders or spokespersons for national trade unions, Governmental environmental directorates, local and national NGOs etc. The interviewees were selected using 'purposive' (because they had particular knowledge or experience) and 'opportunistic' (because they were available) sampling methods. At the same time, care was taken to include a diversity of voices in each country, in terms of varieties of opinion, as well as demographic characteristics such as class, age and ethnicity. For example, the interview sample was made up of a 50/50 split of government opponents and supporters and a representative proportion of the class, age and gender structure of the country. To facilitate more unrestrained speech, only those participants who represented an organisation have been identified, and only where they agreed to be named in the subsequent research outputs.

Before and during data-gathering on the specific countries, a list of environmental justice indicators was developed as a structure to provide a solid base for the research, acting as a detailed series of research questions. These covered the extent to which people had, and believed they had, equal, sufficient and adequate access to a range of environmental goods as well as equal and adequate protection from a range of environmental disruptions (such as hurricanes and flooding) and potentially hazardous substances, such as harmful chemicals, GMOs, radiation, and EMFs. In addition, the questions asked covered a series of procedural issues, including whether those affected by environmental decisions were invited to contribute to the decision-making process; whether environmental decisions were made publicly; whether all parties had access to sufficient material resources to enable them to participate in environmental decision-making on an equal footing; whether the environmental decision-making process was open to all questions and alternatives; whether those affected received accurate and accessible information; and whether those affected had control of the outcome of decisions (ideally, proportional to how much they would be affected). The questions ranged, for example, from asking whether they thought most people living in the country were able to eat a healthy diet to asking them what their experience, if any, had been of challenging a planned or existing development on environmental grounds. Hence, a range of topics were covered in recognition of the interconnected and multi-faceted nature of environmental justice. The data was analysed according to



themes, in two phases (initial coding and explanatory analysis), following Framework Analysis methodology. This included identifying themes in the literature as well as creating new themes from the data itself around typical and emerging environmental injustice issues and explanations.

## Environmental justice in the seven countries

In all the seven countries, many interviewees explained to me that they, personally, and/or their local or national governments or non-governmental organisations had tried to address some or all the aspects of environmental justice that were discussed. For example, in the United States they had worked to develop world-leading legal, institutional and conceptual support for distributive and procedural environmental justice; in the Republic of Korea they had set about becoming a model nation in terms of setting mandatory emissions targets, investing highly in environmental strategies and programmes and promoting eco-friendly products and green life-styles; in the UK, efforts had produced ambitious greenhouse gas reduction targets; in Sweden, they had become global leaders in developing progressive environmental legislation; in China, new environmental laws, collective action and public participation in environmental decision-making had enabled significant improvements in environmental policy making over the last decade; in Bolivia, struggles to achieve a new government and constitution had resulted in policies based upon the harmonious concept of Living Well within ecological limits ('Vivir Bien') and the country becoming one of the first nations in the world to legislate for the rights of nature; and, in Cuba, tiered political representation, the prioritisation of equality and programmes that simultaneously meet both social and environmental need, all favoured environmental justice.

Yet, despite all these positive initiatives, according to the interviewees and the rest of the study data, environmental justice was generally lacking in all the countries looked at. In all seven countries, a myriad of unmet environmental needs were reported and apparent, from a lack of clean air to deficient sanitation and water services. At the same time, there was significant over consumption among particular social groups. For example, despite its pro-ecological image, Sweden has a very high ecological footprint, creating environmental injustices for people living in other countries and for future generations. Yet few that I spoke to in the country problematised this. For example, one interviewee, seemingly oblivious to the environmental justice implications of second/multiple home ownership, stated:

*As a nation we have a strong connection to the environment... We have always been close to nature... Even if you live in Stockholm, it only takes you 10 min in any*

*direction to be out of town and in the forest. So nature is very close. There has also been a very strong perception of vacationing out of the city so one out of every four has a country house (i.e. in addition to their urban dwelling) (interview 7th December 2012, Government Policy Director).*

With regard to distributive environmental justice, a range of environmental inequities built on pronounced social inequalities were evident. Clean air; affordable public transport; sufficient energy for cooking and heating; and safe living and working environments were considered to be less available to low-status and/or low-income groups in almost all of the countries examined. This was often, but not always linked to racial oppression and discrimination, as one US interviewee emphasised:

*Environmental injustice in the United States started when indigenous people were put on reservations, on the worst land; when people lived in slave quarters; when nations, like Puerto Rico, were invaded; when land that could have been used for growing was used to locate polluting industry... Our experience is part of a legacy of abuse (interview, 30th January 2013, Elizabeth Yeampierre, Chair, National Environmental Justice Advisory Council).*

Cuba, the least marketized of the seven countries, was the only one where there did not seem to be evidence of socio-spatial environmental disparities based on race, income or status, primarily, it seems, because there has, until now, been no housing market and so people generally live in socio-economically and racially mixed communities.

There were also across-the-board deficiencies with regard to procedural environmental justice. In all the countries, to a greater or lesser extent, procedural justice policies often focused more on managing and controlling communities than on empowering them. Citizens struggled to become informed about local environmental threats and, even where people had the right of access to information, it was not made available to them in a timely or easily accessible way. Moreover, in most of the countries it was not easy to pursue environmental claims through the courts because of the prohibitive costs. In all the countries, though there were often official channels set up for citizens to become involved in environmental decision making, such opportunities did not always enable actual influence. In South Korea, for example, people spoke very strongly about repression and manipulation in relation to environmental justice, for example, with one interviewee stating:

*Now in Korea there are many environmental protests, especially about proposed nuclear plants, for example, in Samcheok and Yeongdeok ... The plants are located in areas where older people, marginalised people, farmers live... There is supposed to be a hearing process but it doesn't really work. Sometimes, it is deceitful, as they only invite those who support the plant... Then, the location of the plant is announced and local people are*

shocked...(interview, 1st February 2013, Yujin Lee, Director of Policy Making Committee, Korean Green Party Plus).

In most of the countries, responses to determined protests about toxic facilities were often to relocate the hazard, rather than to shut it down. The drive for company profit and economic growth often came to dominate decision making at the expense of ecological and social concerns. In the UK, for example, the Coalition government was cutting back environmental and planning legislation in an attempt to kick-start the faltering economy and support business interests. It had explicitly asserted that eliminating these laws will save UK businesses £1bn (Paterson 2013). Hence, the Chair of the UK Environmental Audit Committee emphasised:

*...the real concern now is the attitude that the current Government has which seems to be equating regulation means bad...we have somehow, almost imperceptively, moved from a situation whereby everyone understanding what the greenest Government ever should look like and should be to 'oh well, at a time of recession and at a time of austerity the last thing on our minds are these green issues' (interview, 25th October, 2012, Joan Walley MP, Chair of the UK Environmental Audit Committee).*

The overall focus on economic growth and profit generally seemed to take precedence across the board, so that only environmental reforms which did not interfere excessively with this could be passed. Consequently, environmental justice legislation, implementation and enforcement, where it existed, focused on the management of risk and the control of public resistance to environmental harms, rather than on eliminating harmful production and consumption altogether.

Hence, despite a great deal of effort, environmental injustice, in all its aspects, prevailed. The reasons for these environmental injustices were multifaceted but it seemed that capitalist processes often prevented the attainment of environmental justice. For example, capitalism's tendency to produce endemic social inequality and geographical segregation had widely provided the basis for distributional environmental injustice, as described here in South Korea:

*...low income groups tend to live on the outskirts of the cities or in distinct inner city areas. Housing costs are one of the most important elements of the Korean household outgoings. Therefore, income will be a strong predictor of the likelihood of living in adequate housing with a range of environmental services (interview 9th October 2012, Senior Economist, Government of the Republic of Korea).*

Furthermore, the capitalist governments of the countries discussed in this paper appeared to be using the environmental crises as business opportunities, promoting profitable but risky environmental solutions, such as carbon trading, geo-engineering, payments for ecosystems services and nuclear power.

The main aspects of capitalism that seemed to underlie the causes of environmental injustice described in this paper were the *concentration of wealth and power*; the *commodification of resources* as a means to gain the hard currency that permits participation in the global market; *the need for growth* in the form of ever-increasing production and consumption (leading to the promotion of consumerism, individualism, modernity and narrow environmental framing); *competition* (resulting in greater internal and external inequalities); *the profit motive* (driving competition and commodification); and *the irrationality of market forces* that are driven by profitability, rather than by human well-being and ecological considerations.

These capitalist drivers were even apparent in the ostensibly socialist countries. For example, in China there has been an intensification of industrial production with the country's opening up to global capitalism and, alongside increasing inequality, this has resulted in reduced air and water quality in poor rural areas. In Cuba, tourism, nickel production and monoculture plantations continue so that the country can access the hard currency needed to fund infrastructure and social projects.

In addition, in all the countries, several other factors also appeared to contribute to environmental injustices including race and class discrimination, a lack of citizen power, industrialisation processes, individual behaviour and culture (including the prevailing environmental values). Even so, these other factors often linked to the requirements of capitalism. For example, particularly in the more capitalist countries but even within the ostensibly socialist systems, many people accepted the prevailing hegemonic environmental values, such as the need for economic growth, the preference for high-technology, and the desirability of consumerist lifestyles. For example, in China, an interviewee commented:

*Since the market reforms in China, a majority of people have internalised the values and norms of a market-dominated economy. The media has encouraged people to try to make money and become rich...Before, people were not so greedy as today. Now people always try their best to make more money, to get more material wealth, cars, cell phones, washing machines. They try their best to improve the material conditions of living... Many people now think that they need more and more things and new things. For example, they change their cell phone every two or three years. They think new things are always better... I think that the whole modernisation ethic comes from the West... Today, though the Communist Party refuse the democracy of the US, they think their lifestyle, industry, science and technology are more advanced than ours... (interview, 9th November 2012, Lu Feng, Professor of Environmental Philosophy, Tsinghua University).*

Similarly, with regard to Cuba's bio-tech industry and the development of transgenics, I was told that the Government was pursuing this path:

*...because of the industrial mentality in the whole world and the blind trust in the objectivity of science in Cuba and the wider world. They want to insert a gene without thinking of the consequences that it could bring. They think it would be an easy solution to the problem of food production... Everywhere there are different mentalities—progressive, backward, atomistic, holistic—these are paradigms that conflict in modern societies and Cuba is no different... the technocrats in Cuba think the same as those in England... Profit is the motive in the capitalist countries but, in Cuba, it is the concern of the state to feed the people... but it is an atomistic technology that sees the world in a simple way... The idea that man can dominate nature is an anthropocentric vision of the environment that does not respect the natural cycles and this has consequences (interview, 16th October 2010, Fernando Funes-Monzote, Professor of Agro-Ecology, University of Matanzas).*

Hence, even the governments of the nominally socialist countries discussed in this paper were struggling to implement socialist policies because of the pressures imposed by, not only a global capitalist context, but also particular hegemonic environmental values and discourses.

It may be that eliminating capitalism is a necessary condition for environmental justice, but not a sufficient condition, as other factors, in particular damaging hegemonic environmental discourses, also need to be specifically addressed. As the Director of the Environment in Cuba explained:

*...with the countries of Eastern Europe, there were a thousand disasters... socialism creates a better opportunity but this opportunity has to be built upon and materialised... it is not automatic, you have to try to create a socialist system where the environmental agenda is driven well, otherwise you will still have environmental problems. Nothing is given, it has to be achieved (interview, 15 January 2009, Dr Orlando Rey Santos, Director, Directorate of Environmental Policy, CITMA).*

Even so, in the countries that were turning away from, resisting or trying to control capitalism, there appeared to be more possibilities for rational decision-making on the basis of need. Hence, there was an emphasis on redistributive measures, rather than patentable technologies, to address social and environmental concerns. For example, in Bolivia, the paradigm of 'Living Well' is the dominant environmental programme, described as an 'alternative civilisational horizon to capitalism' that will ensure balance with Mother Earth as well as 'guarantee the right to water, electricity, basic services to all the population' (interview, 8th April 2013, Juanita Ancieta Orellana, Executive secretary of the National Confederation of Indigenous Women of Bolivia—Bartolina Sisa). This new agenda is, in part, a turn away from capitalism but also an embrace of humanity and nature, as stated here:

*For me, Vivir Bien, is our Andean cosmo-vision. We are a pluri-national state so we are at this stage of finding our path to Vivir Bien. The path before was that of capitalism, that of the rich, now it is that of the people, to serve the people. Therefore, now our pluri-national state is taking the path of the people. ... (interview, 4th April 2013, Leonida Zurita Vargas, Secretary of International Relations, MAS).*

Therefore, in the less capitalist countries it seemed more likely that the dominant discourses around the growth imperative; progress through the latest technology; and rampant consumerism could and would be challenged. Though there were exceptions, in general, the interviewees from the less capitalist countries demonstrated values and approaches in relation to environmental justice which seemed to be less technocratic, commercial and individualistic and more social, visionary and egalitarian than their more capitalist counterparts. Overall, the interviews indicated that, while capitalism seems to directly undermine the attainment of environmental justice there are other influencing factors. However, those factors, while having their own momentum, are nurtured and fuelled when they are convenient for capitalism.

## Policy implications

If capitalist processes underlie and exacerbate environmental injustice, this would imply the need for countries to transform or reject these processes. Capitalism does come in many variants and some forms of capitalism are certainly less environmentally or socially damaging than others. Therefore, it is important to consider the possibility of the perhaps easier task of working to reform capitalism, minimising its negative impacts in order to achieve environmental justice. The case studies showed that some of the redistributive policies and programmes implemented within capitalist countries, such as income transfers, do mitigate some environmental injustices. Even so, the data collected indicated that these programmes do not go far enough. A balance is always struck between that which is necessary to minimise the most obvious environmental and social harms and that which is necessary for the maintenance of, or integration into, the capitalist economy.

Whether capitalism should be reformed or replaced depends on whether it is possible to modify some aspects of the system or whether the various elements are so enmeshed that the system must be rejected altogether. The problematic components of capitalism—growth, the prioritisation of profit, the concentration of wealth and power, excessive competition and irrationality, as described here, seem fundamental to its very existence. To tamper with any of these components would, surely, threaten the system itself and any attempt to do so would very likely be



strongly resisted by those who have a vested interest in the preservation of the system as it is.

Whether there would be support for such radical change, even in the face of the most severe environmental crises that have ever faced humanity, is passionately debated. There is not the space to take up this debate here, though I personally believe that, given the necessary information and hope, many people would welcome such a change, especially the deprived majority who continue to struggle to eke out a very difficult existence. Global surveys of social values suggest that there are a whole raft of beliefs and values now simmering in human consciousness that would support radical social change. For example, a recent survey shows that the top ten values of people living in the UK (in order of priority) are: caring, family, honesty, humour/fun, friendship, fairness, compassion, independence, respect and trust. However, the values that they perceive to be dominant in the country are: bureaucracy, crime and violence, uncertainty, corruption, blame, wasted resources, media influence, conflict, aggression, drug abuse and apathy (Barrett and Clothier 2013). Therefore, it would appear that UK citizens are living in a society that does not reflect their values or meet their needs. This dissonant situation would suggest a strong possibility for change. The recent success of Jeremy Corbyn in the UK Labour Party leadership election, a socialist and the most left wing leader in the Party's history, would support this notion.

To achieve environmental justice, then, it appears necessary to at least minimise the negative impacts of capitalism but perhaps even to begin to dismantle the capitalist system altogether. We need to focus on meeting human needs in a spirit of solidarity among and between humans and the rest of nature. That is not an aspiration or motivation for capitalism. As a system, it is insufficiently holistic to be able to address the environmental and social deficits that environmental justice calls for. The current environmental, social and economic crises present a major challenge to capital, as well as being a new opportunity for its expansion through ever more extensive processes of commodification and monetisation. Aspects of these crises, such as the need to address climate change, or to eradicate poverty are being presented as separate issues requiring technocratic, commercial and individualistic solutions. By expanding and integrating this agenda, we can simultaneously achieve the equity, democracy and sustainability that is inherent in the idea of environmental justice. Therefore, to achieve environmental justice, we should reconsider the current emphasis on market solutions to environmental problems and, instead, consider building our global environmental politics around meeting human needs in the context of a harmonious and respectful relationship with nature.

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